



NEWS RELEASE

United States
Department of Agriculture

Forest Service
Salmon - Challis National Forest
1206 South Challis
Salmon, Idaho 83467



Contact: Kent Fuellenbach (PAO)
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208-756-5145

Forest Service Takes Action to Protect Spawning Chinook on the Middle Fork

In 2011 the Forest Service will take action to ensure recovery and long term stability of Chinook salmon on the Middle Fork of the Salmon River in Idaho. Intensive monitoring by the Forest Service Research Station indicates some Chinook salmon regularly spawn in the Middle Fork and that from August 15 to September 15, redds in the upper river are especially vulnerable to damage. According to Middle Fork District Ranger Chris Grove this time period overlaps the end of the popular summer float boat lottery season and the beginning of the post season reservation period. "The spawning occurs when river flows are diminished, boats are heavy, and people have to do much more walking in the shallows to move the boats down the river," Grove said.

In order to comply with the Endangered Species Act and the Frank Church – River of No Return Wilderness Management Plan, the Forest Service worked with the National Marine Fisheries Service to develop mitigation measures which will allow continued boating on the Middle Fork while restoring the Middle Fork Chinook run, including sustaining and perpetuating Middle Fork spawning.

Mitigation measures involve reissuance of cancellations during spawning and the number of boats allowed per party. After March 15, launch cancellations for the period August 15 through September 15 will not be reissued. A limit of 12 craft per party will be in effect for launch dates during that time period. These measures apply for all float parties, commercial and non-commercial.

"We will still offer seven launch reservations per day on the Middle Fork. However, after March 15, we will not fill launch cancellations for dates between August 15 and September 15," Grove said. "If you draw or reserve a Middle Fork trip during spawning season (August 15 to September 15), you will still be able to go. However, you will be limited to 12 boats."

Other measures include:

- We will encourage parties to stay together so that a party of boaters would only move spawning salmon off the redd once, instead of multiple times.
- We will protect the Middle Fork from aquatic invasive species by ensuring boats are not transporting water or debris from other systems – "clean and dry" with regard to water and debris from other systems.
- We will also implement an education program that includes locating and identifying redds so that boaters and fishermen can avoid disturbing the fish and damaging redds.



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Forest Service Still Accepting Comments on Chinook Conservation and Middle Fork Boating

In October the Middle Fork District Ranger Chris Grove implemented seasonal boating restrictions, to be combined with boater education for the 2011 boating season in order to comply with the Endangered Species Act and the Frank Church – River of No Return Wilderness Management Plan. According to Grove, the Forest needed to act promptly to comply with the Endangered Species Act (ESA). “I am very confident we now have a management strategy that will ensure Chinook salmon conservation while allowing the boating program to continue,” Grove said.

The Chinook spawning run is a vital part of the Wilderness. “These fish hatched here traveled to the Pacific and have made the epic journey back to complete their life cycle. It’s our job to insure they can do that on the Middle Fork” Both the Forest Service and NOAA Fisheries know boating sometimes impacts individual Chinook. That is why the Forest is implementing measures to minimize interactions between boaters and spawning fish, as required under the terms and conditions of a Biological Opinion. Boating over spawning Chinook and their redds on the Middle Fork is similar to the situation in the upper Salmon River near Stanley. The monitoring done there was used to help predict boating effects on Middle Fork Chinook.

Grove noted that, although he is confident the mitigation in place will maintain reproductive success, he will continue looking for ways to improve management. “I intend to be on the Middle Fork this August with River Managers and Fish Biologists to evaluate our success – both in terms of preserving Chinook and maintaining boating opportunity,” Grove said. There are a number of mitigation measures including education, invasive species precautions and a 12 boat limit during Chinook spawning. At this point, most discussion centers on not filling the August 15 to September 15 cancellations.

“Not filling cancellations makes a lot of sense because people tend to cancel when water levels are too low. Low water is when Chinook redds and spawning fish are most vulnerable to damage and disturbance” said Grove. On the other hand, Grove understands that there is a contingent of boaters who have been very successful in obtaining launches by picking up cancellations during this time period. “I’ve talked to some people who, in the last decade or so, have run the Middle Fork every year by filling late season cancellations. There are definitely some low water specialists and this certainly will impact those late summer opportunities, there is no denying that. That’s why it is important to keep looking at effects and options”. Grove emphasized that the Salmon-Challis National Forest will continue to accept comments and suggestions on Chinook conservation as it relates to the boating program. Comments and suggestions can be directed to: Chris Grove, Middle Fork District Ranger,

phone (208) 879-4105 or emailed to one of the following: *middlefork@fs.fed.us* or *comments-intermtn-salmon-challis-middlefork@fs.fed.us*.